

# *The Safety Net*

## National Church Growth Research Center

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*“Praise As Prayer”*

Dear ones,

Last month I began a new series on prayer, focusing on the prayer discipline that is practiced here at Higher Ground. Unfortunately, most of the letters that went out were faulty. The first page was right but pages two and three were from the January letter on stress. Many of you contacted me and I have emailed or mailed you the corrected letter. If you have not contacted me, and want to get the corrected February letter you may download it online at <http://liftedhands.org/newsletter.html>. If you do not have Internet access you may write or call me and I'll be happy to send the corrected letter to you.

Sorry about the mix-up. It was my fault all the way. I was actually pleased that so many of you contacted me. It let me know that people really read this letter and that you are interested in any information on better praying.

As I said last time, I am not writing as an expert, but as a learner. My prayer life definitely took a turn upward in 1978 when I went to the “Change the World School of Prayer” and sat at the feet of Dick Eastman. The passing years have made my time with the Lord more and more precious.

In this letter I want to focus on “praise.”

Even growing up in a Christian home and congregation, I didn't know much about praise. Most of our praise was done through our singing. It was a long time in my life before my theology began to catch up with my hymnology. I'm thankful for those hymn writers who knew how to praise the Lord better than I did.

My own culture was a bit of a hindrance also. In the time and place where I grew up, there was more of an emphasis on “doing” than “praising.” In fact, “praising” was suspect. In family matters there was more concern about “pride” than “self-esteem.” So you didn't praise people, even if they deserved it. The saying was, “It might go to their head.” So you didn't praise children, or adults, or want anyone to praise you. Praise for people was equated with “flattery” and we knew that was wrong. I don't know how many of you grew up in that kind of environment, but it was hard for me to accept praise, or give it, because I had been taught that it was wrong. And if praise was bad for man, how about God?

When it came to God, I knew far more about “thanking” Him than “praising” Him. There was always much to thank Him for but I honestly didn't know how to praise Him. When I tried it, it sounded phony. It actually sounded like flattery. And surely God didn't need to be flattered.

Then one day, a friend of mine named Stanley Shipp, challenged me on the subject. He defined praise as “bragging on God” and argued that it was a wonderful thing to do, not a bad thing. I began to see that “thanking God” was focusing on what God has done, whereas “praising God” is focusing on who He is. The two are similar, but still different.

It isn't that God needs praise. He isn't insecure and depending on us for His self-image. He deserves to be praised! And I am convinced that when we are praising God, Satan exits the scene. He can't stand or withstand the praise of God, so he leaves. Good riddance.

I wanted to praise God, but didn't know how. So I asked for wisdom. And I believe my prayer was answered.

I started with praise passages in the Bible. Psalms like Psalm 139 said things I wanted to say but didn't know how to say. And then I discovered Isaiah 40-66. Twenty-six chapters of solid praise! I didn't have to come up with glorious statements about God, they were already laid out for me in scripture. Old Testament, New Testament, Moses, Jeremiah, David, Paul, and countless others. Even Nebuchadnezzar praised God, and I praised right along with him.

Looking for praise passages in scripture has become a major pursuit and they are endless.

In studying scripture, I have also come to value the countless Names of God that are written there. Addressing God as "Elohim," "Yahweh," "El Shaddai," "Yahweh Shalom," "Yahweh Nissi," etc. has been one of the most enriching things I have ever done. When I feel alone I can pray to Him as "El Roi" and know that He sees me, even though others don't. When I think I am too insignificant to matter I can call on Him (with Daniel) as "God of the heavens" and know that there is no place where He is absent.

There are good study books on Names of God that can help you learn these Names and their significance. Dick Purnell has a 31-day experiment published under the title of "Knowing God by His Names." I can assure you that if you do that experiment you will never be the same, and you will never have difficulty praising God again. Kay Arthur has a wonderful book on God's Names, and there are many others.

Under the Old Covenant, when Jews went to Jerusalem on pilgrimages, there were mile-markers at which they began praising God from the Psalms. The closer they got to the Temple, the more they praised God. They entered into His courts with thanksgiving and praise, and so should we.

In the prayer discipline that we practice here at Higher Ground each prayer begins and ends with praise. Thanksgiving is in between. The instruction given to each person is *"Praise - is an act of commitment to God. Through praise we acknowledge God for who He is, exalt Him with our words, our whole being and our attitude, in prayer. All prayer should start with praise. Psalm 115:1 says: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to Your Name be the Glory, because of Your Love and Faithfulness". We praise Him for His Name, His Justice, Love, Holiness, Omnipotence, Greatness, Faithfulness, His Word, His Creation, His Redemption, etc. You can for instance, use a different theme each time in this time span of Praise and Worship. Expand on this them as much as possible, meditate on it, weigh the practical implications of it on your life and the lives of others. Watch out, though for a mere repetition of words."*

You certainly don't have to come to Higher Ground to praise God. This is a good place, with the mountain so close and dominating, with the peace and order of the pear orchard, and the separating distance from noise and commotion.

But some of the best praise times I've had have been in the midst of cities and crowds. Praise is a mindset that is perhaps above all others.

So I conclude this letter by saying, “Praise be to God, the Father, and to the Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Lord, and there is no other. We praise Him for His majesty, His greatness, and His holiness. We bow down before Him, and honor His greatness. Oh Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, Jehovah, You are the One who creates, Who heals, Who saves. Worthy is Your Name, our Rock and our Fortress. We praise You, honor You, submit to You. Praise be to God!”

Yours through Christ,

Silas